

[Corti's Last Christmas]

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CORTI'S LAST CHRISTMAS

The old Italian turned on the park bench and pointed to the Robert Burns Memorial that stood on a green slope in front of Spaulding High School, overlooking the city park and business streets. It had grace and dignity, a life-size finest of Burns in gray Barre granite. It is said to be the finest memorial in the world to the famous Scotch poet, and the finest example of granite cutting that ever came from Barre.

"Yes," the Italian said, puffing at his pipe. "Rhind from Edinburgh, Scotland, designed that monument. He felt bad not to got the contract to carve it, too. He died without seeing the finished place. The two man who carved it I knew well. Eli Corti did the carving an those panels in the base. Delicate carving, it is. Beautiful. But you got to go close to see how beautiful. They are scenes from Burns' poetry. His business partner, Sam Novelli, carved the statue. Great carvers, those two. The Scotch of Barre gave the memorial to the city in 1899."

The old Italian's face, weather-browed and wrinkled, smiled in the warm sun. He was dressed in clean khaki pants and brown shirt. "I come out to the park lots when it's nice sun in the summer. I like to sit here and meet my old friends and talk.

"I know most everybody in town. In the old days I run a grocery store. Now my boy owns one. I sold tobacco, fruit, 2 and soft drinks. Lots of fruit in those days, business was good. He pointed down Main Street. "My store was 'way down there.[?] The store days are done for me now. My legs are gone bad. " He took a few puffs from his pipe.

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"Corti I know well. We were friends. He came in my store a lot. [Quiet?], he was. Just a small, thin fellow. People talk more about him now than when he was alive. Lots of times they do that way with a man. That fellow Garetto who shot him lived here for quite a while after he got out of jail. Ten to twelve years of hard labor at Windsor he got, but I don't think he stayed that long. He came back to Barre and went to work. Blacksmith, he was, a tool-sharpener. He worked in the shed for a big company here when the trouble started. He never made trouble again. I knew Garetto, too. A happy man all the time. I think he never meant to shoot Corti. He had no reason. Only thing is—Garetto carried a pistol, he got excited, and he shot. Hot-head stuff. Crazy for a minute and sorry all the time after. A few years ago he and his wife went back to Italy.

"My friend Corti was born in a little town near [Milan?], Italy. He learned the carving trade there. Some say he studied at the Reale Academia of Arts, some say no. He never told me. He was no great talker. Anyway, he was a fine carver when he came to America in 1890. He got married and had three children. He became a junior partner in his firm. A granite statuary firm.

"The trouble started between the socialists and anarchists. It was an old feud that started when the socialists built a block on Granite Street for their meetings. Garetto was a socialist. 3 A man named Serrati owned a socialist newspaper - Il Proletario - in New York. He called the anarchists some bad names. Anyway, one Saturday night in 1903 Serrati was coming to give a speech in this socialist building. He didn't get there at 7 o'clock sharp, so some of the men they began to holler and yell. There were lots of anarchists at the meeting, too. It was advertised for every laboring man to come. The noise got worse, and some of the men got mad. The excitement was at a mad point. Then this Garetto, he pulled out a gun — a .32. The men told him to stop. Corti was standing by the door. Not yelling, not even talking, they say. Anyway, Garetto fired two shots. One hit a man named Vochini under the arm. Not a bad wound. The other hit Corti in the stomach. The men

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throw Garetto down the stairs. He ran to the judge's office for protection. All banged-up he was. The police got him there.

“At half-past ten that night they brought Corti to the Montpelier Hospital in an ambulance. The police took Garetto, caught up with the ambulance, and took him in front of Corti. Corti said: 'That's the man.' He said it twice, and Sam Novelli, Corti's partner, got mad and made a grab for Garetto. Sam and Corti were good partners and good friends. Chief Brown had to hold Novelli from taking his own revolver and using it on Garetto.

“Three doctors helped with the operation on Corti. But no good. The wound was like McKinley's. The bullet entered the stomach, went through both walls, just touched the liver and settled in his back. The doctors couldn't find the bullet, 4 and Corti died at midnight. Only thirty-four years old.

“Corti was buried next day. Monday. When he was dying he gave orders for his funeral. He said he wanted to be buried right away, and he didn't want a band at his funeral. The funeral was held from his home. I remember the street outside was filled with [Barre?] people. Not only his friends. Anarchists, socialists, everybody. He was buried in Hope Cemetery. The monument they set up over Corti's grave gets more notice today than any other one in the cemetery. It is a statue of Corti carved by his brother. He looks alive. Everything is perfect — bow tie, the buttons on his shoes; the wrinkles in his suit. Beside him, carved from granite too, are his stone-working tools. With a stone like that Corti will not be forgotten! If he could see it he'd be proud of his brother for cutting such a piece.

The old Italian drew out a big blue handkerchief and wiped his sun-warmed brow. He said a little hesitantly; “Now I will tell you something maybe you won't believe. I don't blame you. [Sometimes?] I don't believe it myself. Sometimes I think it is in my head I saw the picture, not in my eyes. All the day before Christmas that year after Corti was shot, I worked in my store. That night we heard that Garetto was sentenced to [Windsor?]. I left the store just before midnight. I was going to a party at a friend's house. I walked

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up that street you see goes by the Burns Memorial on the left. It was snowing and not many people were out on the street. When I got close to the statue I saw a man there. It was Corti, plain as day I saw him. Just standing there, his head down a little, and looking at those panels he carved. [Sad?], he looked, standing there in the snow. 5 It seemed natural he was there. I had been thinking all day about him in the store. I wanted to say something but he was gone — just like that! But I saw him. It was Corti all right. And it was one Christmas Eve I can't forget.”